

Untruths and *The Maid* by Kimberly Cutter

by Mike MacCarthy

Summary:

My entire thoughts about this book are unusually long, so I hereby present a much shorter rendition of my opinion concerning this book. The unabridged account immediately follows:

Author Kimberly Cutter claims that her book about Joan of Arc, *The Maid*, is a true story, but it's not. Her version of the life of this girl saint and inspiration for all mankind for over 600 years is riddled with inaccuracies, gross misrepresentations, and substantive omissions. We know this because there have been tens of thousands of books written about the girl from Domrémy, not to mention France's carefully preserved public records of two major government trials concerning *La Pucelle*. The facts are in those records for all to see, so why would anyone want to write a book that didn't present all the facts? The reader is encouraged to draw their own conclusions.

Untruths and *The Maid* by Kimberly Cutter (unabridged essay)

by Mike MacCarthy

If you're expecting a rave review about *The Maid* by Kimberly Cutter, you should stop reading.

When an author goes to the trouble to write a historical novel about Jehanne d'Arc, I expect the truth. If you're not going to tell the truth about her, then why bother? I hoped for inspiring insights about Jehanne when I bought Ms. Cutter's book. What a disappointment.

In the Author's Note buried in the back of her book, Ms. Cutter poses the question, "How much is true (in her book)?" Her short answer: "Almost everything." Having read *The Maid* cover-to-cover, my short answer is: "Not very much—not even the Author's Note."

Truth has been one of mankind's on-going quests—a goal we never really expect to achieve—but one for which we can all nobly strive. When we read well-documented historical fiction, we expect to learn new truths or a better understanding of old truths, such as in *Killer Angels* by Michael Shaara. In this award-winning book, we come to a much deeper understanding of the Battle of Gettysburg and its major players through historical fiction—a fiction that adheres to the facts of that battle while also accurately painting in the personalities of some of its major players, their motivations, and their known inter-personal conflicts.

"How is this possible," you ask, "when it all took place so long ago? Because the historical record of the Battle of Gettysburg and its major players has been so well documented and preserved that those who want to take the trouble to go into these historical records can read it for themselves. Michael Shaara decided to do the research for his readers and then re-wrote that information into a narrative of an amazing historical novel—one that enjoyed incredible sales,

world-wide circulation, and numerous awards for excellence in writing. That's what we expect from documented historical fiction—accurate history mixed together with the human condition.

The basic facts of Jehanne's life and death are irrefutable because two complete public court trial records have been maintained and preserved by the French government for over 600 years. Through honest research, the true facts of her life beginning with her childhood and going through to the end of her life are easily knowable. Those facts alone have formed the foundation for more than 30,000 books written about Jehanne's remarkable life even by those who were or remain her most harsh critics. But Ms. Cutter apparently doesn't see it that way; despite her representations to the contrary, she saw fit to invent her own facts about Jehanne and her life.

Cutter alleges in her Author's Note that she has only taken "novelistic license" with: (1) her falsified rendition of Jehanne's sister Catherine, how old she was when she died, and how she died; (2) the untrue death of Bertrand de Poulegny (one of Jehanne's earliest body guards and loyal supporters) as well as his campfire version of the Battle of Agincourt; (3) her invented conclusion that Jehanne "may have lied" about her virginity at the end of her trial in 1431.

Ms. Cutter's allegation that Jehanne d'Arc, a canonized Catholic saint, "may" have publicly lied is contradicted by all other facts known about this young woman's life. The testimony at both trials, as well as all the writings about her life in the centuries that have followed, clearly demonstrate beyond all reasonable doubt that Jehanne was indeed a truth-teller—almost to a fault. Such searchers for truth as Mark Twain and Winston Churchill (among many others) are on record as to their conviction that she was a speaker of truth.

Her truthfulness most certainly bothered those who relentlessly cross-examined her not only at her trial in 1431, but earlier in 1429 when Charles VII was trying to establish that he was not being duped by this peasant farm girl from the hills of northeastern France. In March of 1429, she told him at his castle in Chinon that she had been sent by God to lead his troops to victory over the English at Orléans and to then crown him king of all France. Each of the learned judges, Doctors of Theology, and Philosophy, whom he personally appointed to investigate and interview Jehanne, tried to trick her into contradictions about her statements that she had been sent by God. But they all eventually concluded that she was a truth-teller and that her word could be and should be relied upon. They wrote Charles VII, saying, "We found only humility, purity, honesty, and simplicity." Apparently, this was not good enough for Ms. Cutter.

Some of the advisors to Charles VII even thought Jehanne might be lying about her virginity, so Charles commissioned the one person he most trusted in the world—his mother-in-law (Queen Yolande of Sicily)—to physically determine her virginity. Jehanne easily passed that test.

So for Ms. Cutter to allege in *The Maid* that by 1431, Jehanne's trustworthy moral fiber would have suddenly changed seems a deliberate misrepresentation of the facts and an insult to the memory and character of this incredible teenage saint, of which Cutter claims to be an admirer. Yet the author then alleges later in her Author's Note that Jehanne suffered from a "fierce and enormous pride" that prevented the girl from telling the truth of her alleged rape.

Once again, the testimony of the Doctors of the Church, the eye-witness accounts and public testimony of those who knew her from childhood and accompanied her during her various military campaigns completely contradict this inexplicable assertion by Ms. Cutter. What's even more puzzling is that in the Acknowledgments Section of her book, the author praises the book (among others) *Joan of Arc: In Her Own Words*. It's hard to reconcile Ms. Cutter's allegation of Jehanne's "fierce and enormous pride" with the following quote from the girl in August 1429 from that same book which clearly demonstrates the depth of her humility:

The teenager is asked: "*O Jehanne, where do you expect to die?*" The girl answers: "*Wherever it may please God, for I am no more sure of the hour or the season or the place than you. And would that it were more pleasing to God my maker, and I go to serve my mother and father, keeping their sheep with my sister and my brothers; they would be very glad to see me!*"

A reader could reasonably wonder how, after reading those books in her Acknowledgements Section, Ms. Cutter could write so many non-truths about Jehanne, her life, and that of her family. For instance, early in her book, Ms. Cutter claims that Jacques d'Arc began going mad when Jehanne was a young girl—swearing, screaming, often drunk, running naked outdoors, punching his wife and daughter, calling his sons "cowards" and "wastrels." The public and private records concerning the childhood of Jehanne d'Arc unmistakably reveal that her father was well thought of throughout his entire life by family, friends, and townspeople alike. In her nonfiction book, *Saint Joan of Arc* (another of the books listed in Ms. Cutter's Acknowledgements Section), V. Sackville-West wrote: "*Jacques d'Arc . . . was what we should now call a peasant-farmer with certain official responsibilities suggested by his exemplary character and that of his wife, as much by his social standing and solvency.*" Ms. Sackville-West then goes on to explain that Jacques d'Arc was appointed *adjudicataire* of the local château in 1419, then sergeant of Domrémy in 1423, ranking immediately after the mayor and sheriff of the town. Hardly the kind of public confidence and trust given a drunken madman Ms. Cutter alleges that he was.

Even more incredibly, during her telling of the Battle of Orléans, Ms. Cutter produces yet another set of invented facts (this is by no means a comprehensive list):

1. Ms. Cutter writes that Jehanne's friend and cousin to Charles VII, the Duke of Alençon, accompanied her during this battle. **The documented fact** is the Duke of Alençon did not join Jehanne in Orléans until well after this battle had been won by Jehanne and the French forces of that city. Before that, he had been assigned other duties by Charles VII.
2. Ms. Cutter alleges that before leaving Blois for Orléans, Jehanne sent one of her heralds (Amberville) with a letter for the English generals in that city. This author represents that, "*They never saw him again.*" **The documented fact is** Jehanne never sent a letter via one of her heralds to the English generals before leaving Blois. She did send them a letter after she arrived in Orléans, but delivered it in person via an arrow shot by a French soldier. After the Battle of Saint Loup, Jehanne did send a message via one of her heralds (the rules of engagement in those days stipulated that heralds were considered neutral by both sides), and the English did hold him captive this time. After the Battle of

Orléans was won by the French, Jehanne found her lost herald chained to a stake, ready to be burned alive. The English forgot to do it.

3. Ms. Cutter also writes that Jehanne used her sword to fight the enemy in the battles to raise the siege of Orléans and later on. **The documented facts and testimony are** that Jehanne never used her sword to fight in battle—in Orléans or anywhere else. She wore it as a defense precaution in case she was ever attacked while alone. She never was.

Once again we have the facts of *Joan of Arc: In Her Own Words* as powerful testimony against Ms. Cutter allegations about the girl's use of her sword: "*But I loved my banner forty times better than my sword. And when I went against the enemy, I carried my banner myself, lest I kill any. I have never killed a man.*"

4. Ms. Cutter maintains that the Battle of Saint Augustins was the only battle that immediately preceded the Battle of Les Tourelles. **The documented facts and testimony are** that at the battle for the Bastille Saint Jean de Blanc, once the English saw Jehanne and the French crossing the Loire River toward their position, they abandoned the Bastille Saint Jean de Blanc and ran westward along the banks of the Loire for the safety of the Bastille Saint Augustins. Jehanne and the French quickly pursued the English that same day (Friday, May 6, 1429) to the Bastille Saint Augustins and then that battle ensued. Once again, Jehanne and the French were victorious and the English then ran further westward to the safety (they believed) of the Bastille Les Tourelles. To omit the Battle of the Bastille Saint Jean de Blanc is an important non-truth by omission because of the unusual circumstances of that French charge, led by Jehanne.
5. Ms. Cutter represents that midway through the Battle of Augustins, Jehanne was taken captive by a knife-wielding Englishmen and saved by the Duke of Alençon. **The documented facts and testimony are** that no such incident ever took place at the Battle of Saint Augustins or at any other battle around Orléans. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the Duke of Alençon could not have saved the girl, had she been grabbed—he wasn't present during that battle. Her two most faithful comrades in arms during that battle were the brilliant Bastard of Orléans and the fierce and bawdy La Hire.

Also, just before the beginning of battle for the Bastille of Saint Augustins, Jehanne accidentally stepped on a spiked caltrop as she was planting her pennant in the ground just outside the Saint Augustins fortifications. The incident caused much bleeding and pain for the girl in her booted foot. Nonetheless, she never even stopped to assess the severity of the wound until well after the Battle of Augustins had been won by the French. Somehow, Ms. Cutter also omitted that important fact.

6. Ms. Cutter represents that in the afternoon of the Battle of Tourelles (May 7, 1429), Jehanne was wounded by an arrow in her back. **The documented facts and testimony are** that Jehanne was not struck in the back, but in her left front shoulder from high above, immediately knocking her to the ground at the foot of the ladder she'd been

climbing. English soldiers thought they could get to her before the French, but were quickly attacked and driven off by French soldiers and generals.

7. Ms. Cutter alleges that when Jehanne finally pulled the arrow from her shoulder at the Bastille Saint Augustins temporary field hospital, the resultant pain and gushing blood caused her to exclaim, “F**k!” **The documented facts are** that Jehanne never uttered a swear word of any kind in her entire life, no matter the provocation. Never!

Furthermore, Jehanne had advised the French soldiers and officers before arriving in Orléans that if they wanted to fight for God alongside her, they must cease swearing, go to confession, and receive daily communion. She also banned prostitutes from camp. Ms. Sackville-West wrote: “*First she [Jehanne] made them [the French military] all go to confession, and then decreed that all of their loose women should be left behind, two edicts which must have astonished them considerably, but which they nevertheless obeyed.*”

Two final examples of material factual omissions by Ms. Cutter in *The Maid*:

1. When the English finally got around to burning Jehanne at the stake in Rouen, France, May 30, 1431, she was incinerated without benefit of any humanitarian pain-killers or poison as was most usually prescribed in those days. All Jehanne ever did while burning was to ask to see a cross of Jesus, while she repeated his name over and over, “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus . . .” until the 19-year-old girl had perished.
2. Once the embers had cooled, the English ordered their guards to remove all the ashes, entrails, and remnants of Jehanne d’Arc. As the guards tried to follow orders, they found that her heart had not burned. Twice more they tried to burn her heart and failed. Finally, (according to Nancy Goodman in her book *The Maid and the Queen*) “*the executioner was ordered to throw her (Jehanne’s) heart, which had remained intact, along with the rest of her ashes into the Seine.*”

By now, it must be obvious to the reader that in her book *The Maid*, Ms. Cutter cannot be counted upon to tell the truth about the life and death of Jehanne d’Arc. Therefore, I cannot recommend it for reading by anyone who is interested in the truth of the life of Jehanne d’Arc.

What makes me shudder in horror is how numerous so-called well informed or well-read people in the press, the publishing world, and Hollywood believe that this book presents the truth of Jehanne d’Arc. I feel like the little boy in the story of the *Emperor’s New Clothes*.

Mike MacCarthy is a freelance writer and current Editor-in-Chief of InterACT, a quarterly newsletter for the Association of Christian Therapists (ACT). He has spent most of his life reading about Jehanne d’Arc especially the last ten years while he wrote his own book about Jehanne d’Arc at the Battle of Orléans entitled, God’s Maiden General.